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FLOOR DEBATE

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nation in the percentage of our total state and local budgets spent on education. Importantly, spending on elementary and secondary education comprises nearly 30 percent of our current state General Fund budget. Despite this commitment, however, we find ourselves facing major litigation that challenges the way in which we distribute funding to our public schools. Senator Raikes and the Education Committee offer our state a way to improve our funding formula with LB 698. Proposed adjustments address important concerns that have been raised about the cost of educating students stricken by poverty, and those with limited English proficiency. The bill also tackles concerns that districts have raised about grade weighting, cost allowance, adjusted valuation aspects of the current formula. I applaud Senator Raikes for reaching out to all sides to find a solution to one of the most significant issues Nebraska faces. I encourage our school districts, I encourage our school districts to come to the table and offer insight as to how we might best address and finance today's classroom needs. Please pass LB 698. Put it on my desk, and I will sign it into law. A third area of needed reform requires a reexamination of Initiative 300. Twenty years ago, I-300 became part of our state constitution. It was touted as an effort to keep big corporations out of farming, thereby saving the family farm. Its provisions were very broad and far-reaching. Very directly, it limited the ability of farmers and ranchers to sell their land. But in return, it was to protect our state from big corporate operations. A similar constitutional approach was enacted in South Dakota. Very recently, the United States Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit ruled that the South Dakota constitutional provision violated the commerce clause of the United States Constitution and was therefore invalid. We take note of the ruling, knowing that Nebraska falls within the 8th Circuit jurisdictional boundaries. In the last 20 years, we have also learned that I-300 has had unintended consequences. Neighbors can't pool their resources in a corporate structure to farm together, raise livestock together, or bring their children into the family corporat...or the farming corporation. I-300 prohibits that activity. The solution to this dilemma is not immediately obvious. The legal decision in South Dakota is very complex and its impact on Nebraska is not readily clear. For this reason, I support Senator Kremer's approach to bring